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Miscellanea

“The great monastic libraries of medieval Europe, contrary to the popular stereotype, were not silent study halls for cloistered monks. They were noisy places where scribes, bookbinders and other artisans collaborated to create the astonishing illuminated manuscripts that flourished in the age before Gutenberg. Some visitors called them ‘houses of mumblers’ because the monks liked to recite their texts out loud while they copied them. These, too, were living places, devoted not just to book preservation but to bringing scholars together to work with each other in the three-dimensional world.”
--from “Libraries as places to linger and mingle” by Alex Wright Christian Science Monitor January 13, 2006

“Gerald of Wales, as a boy, preferred to build sand churches and monasteries to sand castles.”
--from Gerald of Wales (trans. Loomis) 1985, p. xiii; T.A. Heslop, “Late Twelfth-Century Writing about Art, and Aesthetic Relativity,” in G.R. Owen-Crocker and T. Graham (eds.), *Medieval Art: Recent Perspectives. A Memorial Tribute to C.R. Dodwell* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1998), pp. 132-35.



Medieval chained library, Hereford Cathedral. Photo: Sarah Blick.

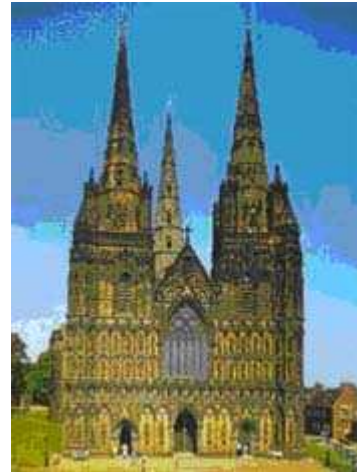


Short Notices and Announcements

Two English Saints Shrines Discovered



Nave, choir area Lichfield Cathedral, 13th century



Lichfield Cathedral, England, 1265-1320

Archaeologists discover Saint Chad's Burial Place and Shrine

Archaeologists working at Lichfield Cathedral have uncovered the church built to house the grave of St Chad; together with the “Lichfield Angel” - part of the shrine created c. 700 by Bishop Hedda to mark the resting place of Lichfield’s first bishop. When Chad became the fifth bishop of the Mercians in 669 he moved the bishopric from Repton to Lichfield. Chad died March 2, 672 and the Venerable Bede wrote that he was buried “close by” the Church of St. Mary, but that his body was later transferred to the new church of St. Peter. Unfortunately, the precise location of neither of these churches was known. Now archaeologists under the guidance of Dr. Warwick Rodwell have revealed that both St. Peter’s Church and St. Mary’s Church lie under the floor of the present cathedral.



Their finds in the nave include: St. Peter’s Church, the Chad’s shrine, and a number of high-status later burials around the shrine. The remains of St Mary’s Church were

discovered in the 1990s during a major program to replace broken limestone flooring, but it wasn't until the remains of St. Peter's Church were found that it was possible to definitively identify the remains found in the 1990s as St Mary's Church – the church where Chad preached. Most significantly at the east end of the site a sunken chamber was discovered with the subsequent embellishment of a canopy marking its honor. Such a structure suggested a shrine or grave and the position and the description accorded with the description by Bede leading scholars to identify it as the original position of the shrine of St Chad.

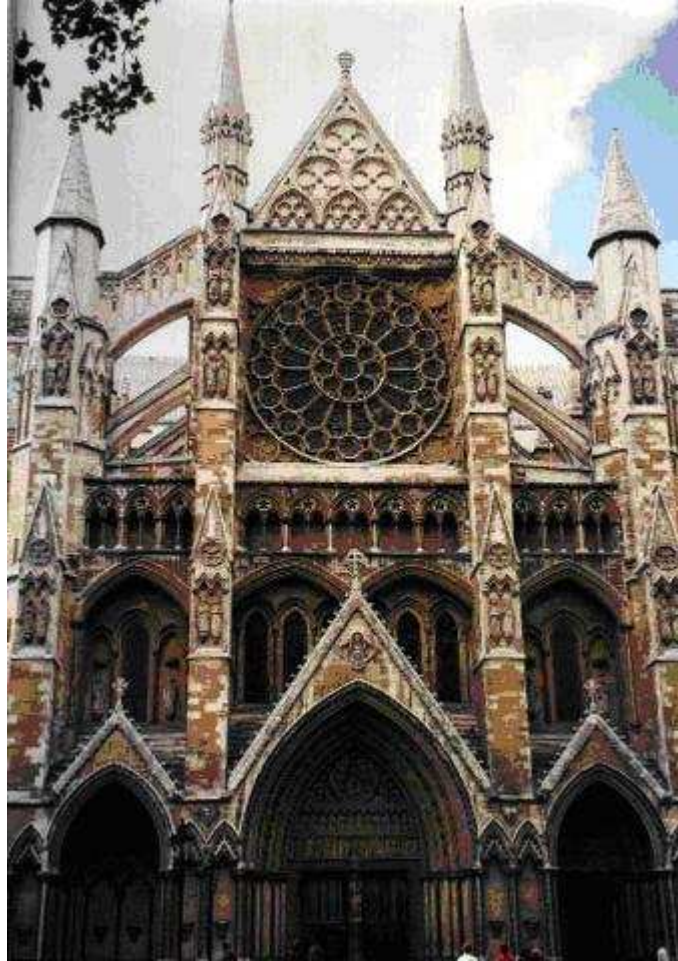
The remnants of Chad's shrine have revealed the 'Lichfield Angel' composed of three adjoining fragments of an Anglo-Saxon sculptured panel made of cream shelly limestone. Remarkably, the piece retains a good deal of its original polychromy. It may be the left panel of an Annunciation, but despite extensive excavation, no matching figure of the Virgin Mary has yet been discovered. Professor Rosemary Cramp, a senior expert in Anglo-Saxon archaeology, described the 'Lichfield Angel' as being of "European importance". She added: "This carving is crucially important for the light it throws on the chronology of Anglo Saxon sculpture. Only a handful of sites have produced sculptures which are archaeologically stratified as belonging to the pre-conquest period. This piece is unusual in that an almost complete panel of a casket has been carefully re-buried, some time before the Norman Conquest ... This piece provides something of a missing link between England and the continent in the revival of late antique styles, a revival which on the continent is demonstrated in manuscripts and ivories, not large scale carvings. The conservation of the 'Lichfield Angel' and its formal, stylistic and iconographic analysis is obviously of crucial importance."

--Re-written from the press release from Lichfield Cathedral's website

<http://www.lichfield-cathedral.org/angel.htm>

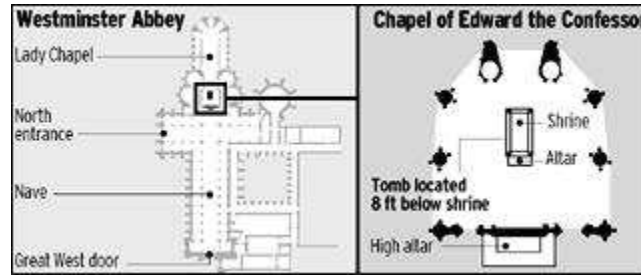
Original Tomb of King Edward the Confessor discovered in Westminster Abbey

Using radar technology during conservation work on the medieval Cosmati pavement near the high altar, archaeologists led by Dr. Warwick Rodwell found the burial site of the king and saint Edward the Confessor. When examining the construction of the Cosmati pavement, which dates from 1268, using a very high-frequency radar to a depth of about 20 inches, the archaeologists intensified the power of the radar to analyze deeper sections of the pavement. To their great surprise they found chambers, vaults, and foundations dating back over 1,000 years to the founding of the Abbey.



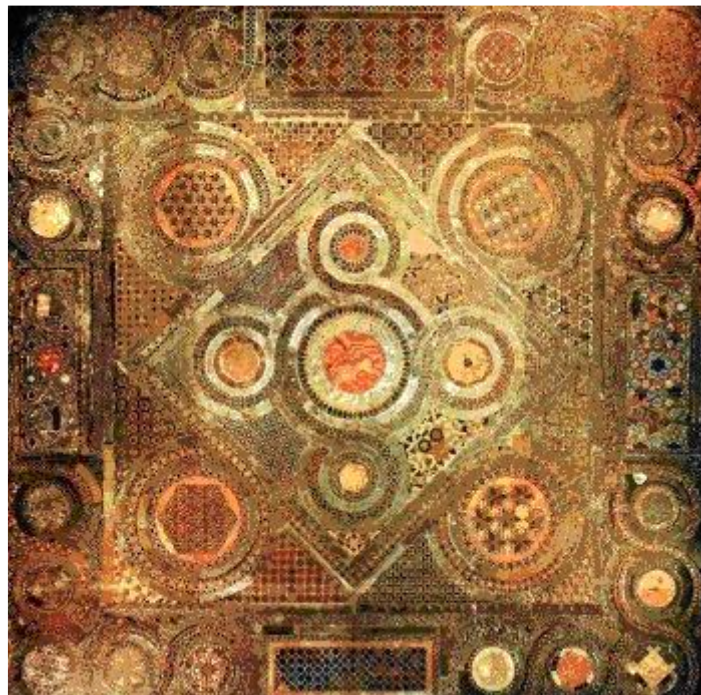
Until now it was assumed that the original tomb of Edward the Confessor was near the present high altar, because medieval records tell of him being buried there. But the new findings reveal that Henry II moved the altar in the mid-13th century. Edward's original tomb is located 10 feet behind the modern-day altar, directly under the area of the shrine built to honor the saint in 1269.

Under the pavement behind the present high altar, is a tomb where Henry III is believed to have been temporarily laid to rest in 1272. This was an empty chamber at that time as it had previously held the body of Edward the Confessor before the saint's remains were disinterred and transferred a few feet up and across to the shrine in 1163. In 1290, Henry's remains were moved to his own sumptuous tomb in the north ambulatory, again just a few feet away. In the same year Eleanor of Castile (Queen of Edward I) died suddenly and was temporarily placed in the old tomb while her own burial place in the northeast corner of the chapel was being prepared.



The radar picked up two distinct features. First, adjoining the shrine, and presumably continuing underneath it, is a substantial chamber with an arched or vaulted roof. This lies directly below the present shrine altar. While the east-west dimension of the chamber cannot be measured due to the position of the present shrine, the width is approximately 2m, and the radar has defined the curvature of the vault as about 1m in radius. The floor of the chamber lies about 1.75m below the present floor.

The second discovery is a rectangular feature, immediately adjoining the chamber on the west, and of about the same width. It has the characteristics of a pit for access to the main chamber, the filling of which appears to be a series of horizontal layers of different materials. These may be interpreted as alternate layers of soil and rubble carefully packed in the pit, a well-known medieval practice adopted to prevent subsidence.



13th-century Cosmati pavement in Westminster Abbey

Under the altar steps there is evidence that suggests the presence of two shallow

tombs, side by side: one has an arched roof, the other is flat-topped. Another unknown tomb was found north of the altar, lying partly in the sanctuary and partly under the stone screen erected in 1441. In addition to this, under the Cosmati pavement around the Confessor's shrine, several hitherto-unknown graves were discovered. There are single tombs flanking the shrine on the north and south, and a line of what appear to be small graves – potentially royal children – across the east end.

There are no plans to excavate the tomb because any such work would destroy the medieval pavement.

--Re-written from *Telegraph* article by Jonathan Petre, February 12, 2005 and from Westminster Abbey's website:

http://www.westminster-abbey.org/20051202_royaltombs.htm

A French silver coin has been found embedded in the keel of a medieval ship uncovered on the banks of the river Usk in Newport three years ago.

The discovery of the 15th Century coin is being interpreted as a sign that the ship came originally from France. Scholars believe the coin was new and was intended to be a good luck charm. The Newport ship is the most complete surviving 15th Century vessel discovered in recent years. It was found on the banks of the river during the construction of The Riverfront arts centre. The coin, wrapped in tarred caulking, was discovered in one of the timbers being studied by the city council's ship recording team.



It was placed in a hole cut above the ship's keel at the point where it connects to the stem-post, the timber which forms the bow. The two timbers would have been the first the ship's builders put in position and archaeologists believe the coin was inserted as a good luck charm.

The coin has been identified as a *petit blanc* of the Dauphin Louis de France, who became Louis XI in 1461. Minted between 1440-56, the coin comes from Dauphiné, an area of south-eastern France traditionally held by the Dauphin, the eldest son of the king of France. The outward face of the coin shows a cross and is inscribed in Latin "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

--Re-written from *BBC* news report

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/4686056.stm